Group Assignment: Building Ancient Senegalese Instruments

For this assignment, you will be building an instrument with your group. To get you started on choosing your instrument, please read the following primer and get acquainted with the four families of instruments. Then make decisions on the materials you will use, which instrument you will actually construct, and which family it will belong to. You will also need to designate the following members: 1) Project Coordinator 2) Historian 3) Bibliographer 4) Head Foreman

Project Coordinator – you are responsible for getting your team up and running. You should be scheduling the dates/times your team meets, and you should be responsible for exchanging phone numbers and emails with all teammates to make sure you are able to meet. You will also be responsible for informing your instructor and others if a member if not meeting expectations. You should be orderly, and have great leadership skills. You will be responsible to look over the finalized product of your Assignment #2 including all parts and sign off on it.

*You will then submit a 1½ - 2 page paper on your experience in this role.

Historian – You are responsible for writing about the history of the instrument that is being constructed in your group. You have a natural knack for writing and are interested in music history. You should excellent grammar skills, and will seek help on improving the writing with your instructor if needed. Please note, other members of your group should aid you in what you will write, and will make suggestions to you on research. You are responsible for the historical facts of the instrument, the original construction, and will present the history in class. *Note your 1 ½ - 2 page submission will be on the history that you presented. Please reach out to me if you need to access the Garland Encyclopedia of World Music for the article on Senegal.

Bibliographer – You are responsible for the bibliography surrounding the assignment. This means you will be creating a bibliography of at least 10+ sources that states where your received your research information for this assignment AND various resources that one can consider if they would like to research the instrument you have constructed. The person in this role may have interests as an archivist or librarian. The person in this role needs to understand bibliographies, and how to construct them properly in an MLA format. Your instructor can provide help with this at any time and we will most likely be in contact often throughout the project. As a bibliographer, you are expected to find actual books, articles, and physical materials outside of the Internet in addition to online sources – so be ready to visit a library. *Please note that you will be submitting the bibliography along with a 1-page explanation of your findings and your experience in this role.

Head Foreman – You have the main role in the construction of your group’s instrument. You will take suggestions from your team on the instrument, material of choice, and the assembly, but it is your decision that will ultimately shape the makeup of the actual instrument. You should be creative, orderly, and direct with instructions, and you will understand faulty materials from stronger ones. Perhaps you have an interest in engineering or physics? You will be expected to direct team members to
complete their part of the creative process (whether it be coloring/cutting/glue etc.) yet you will be the main construction team member. When it comes time for presentation, you will be the team member to ‘perform’ for the class, and you will also sign off on the construction process. *Note a 1 ½ - 2 page submission of your experience in this role will be submitted for your part of the project.

Construction
I leave you all responsible to construct your instrument as a team. I want all of you to participate in some way – whether it means: cutting and shaping, drawing/painting, or pasting and coloring. Ultimately, the Head Foreman is responsible for body assemblage. We will have an allotted day to work in class on these, but this should also be done on your own as a group.

Materials
One of the goals with this assignment is to have you understand that Senegalese instruments were made of resources that communities found available to them in their respective locations. Now 1000 years ago, that meant wood, bones, animals, and plants growing in one’s native locale. For this assignment today, this could mean materials found in your kitchen, garage, thrift shop, and recycling unit. Be resourceful and attempt to use materials you have in your house before you go and make expensive purchases. You should not be spending a lot of money on the project – you may visit a hardware store or art shop if needed, yet attempt to be resourceful with what you have available FIRST.

Writing
I do not want the amount of research to fall on one person. Therefore, all members of the group will construct ideas, research, and information and send it to their historian.

Final Assessments
You will all be writing a bit for the homework submissions, and this includes a final assessment which will inform your instructor (confidentially) of the members who worked on the assignment. You will be assessing each other as a group and individuals.

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Instrument Families: A General Primer
In our class, we mostly speak of instrument categories in the Hornbostel-Sachs system - however you will begin to see that the instruments contained in our ‘families’ of music actually derive from instruments made 100s-1000s of years ago! For example, the timpani in the percussion section stems from ancient drum models.

This is a sabar drum from Senegal. It is considered a percussion instrument and it contains a drumhead and a resonating body. If you consider the origins and makeup of drums throughout the history of the world, this is more or less what the model of them
are. The drumhead would have been made of cowhide (the skin of a cow) or the skin of another animal – such as fish, snake, buckskin and others. The resonator needs to be a hulled out or hollow part – such as a gourd, calabash, tree trunk et al. What can you use to create a ‘hide’ in the modern day?

What about instruments that are struck? These also become part of the percussion section in Western music. In world music, we would call these id...hine, claves, and bells – search for Bronze Age info online.

Aerophones: Flutes are some of the longest surviving instruments found on the planet! They were made from femurs, branches, clay, bamboo and various types of wood – depending on where you lived. Because of the original constructions of flutes throughout the world, we can see an early model for the European recorder and we still use the idea of the 6 holes on front/1 on back model:

What other types of aerophone instruments can you create? Remember all you need is air and some sort of a ‘body’ to classify it in this family. In “classical” music we hear about the: oboe, recorder, flute, bassoon, and tuba. How elaborate can you make this? Will you use a reed? Test a few before you commit – as flutes are finicky creatures.

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Brass instruments arrive later – but we can first thank ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome, and then Scandinavia. Think about the placement of the Bronze Age, Iron Age, and the industrial revolutions of Europe. You won’t find these in Africa until colonial eras, and brass band music was adapted widely in English territories. Although instruments made of metal existed prior to the Renaissance, Europe only began mass-producing them after 1500! That’s A LOT of catching up to do – think about various metals you could use for your project: tin, aluminum foil, bottle caps, sheet metal, pots/pans and others – the possibilities are endless – just be sure you create a resonating body with your metals – that is how the brass family works. View the tube of the tuba below:

The more coils you see, the deeper the sound it should produce. Also think about the trombone where you can elongate the coils by stretching it out on a slide! An incredible mechanism that was invented during the Renaissance and first used with trumpets. By the Civil War, brass instruments included all sorts of valves, slides, and bells and whistles (not literally). They were turned upside down and bells were inverted, and sometimes made to be over 6 feet long! Do some research in this area to get better ideas of brass shapes you could create.

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**Chordophones:** Strings are a part of ancient history and the construction of instruments worldwide. In Persia, they were constructed of animal gut while in Japan, silk was used. The use of steel and tungsten was a 19th century arrival in Europe. What else can you use to recreate strings? What will use for a resonator? Do you need a bow for your string instrument? See the picture of instruments on the following pages to remember that even though we consider violin, viola, and cello members of the string family in Western music, there are SO many string instruments that were created before these. Here is an example of a *kora* that is prevalent in Senegalese *griot* traditions:

A group of *koras*:

(illustrations by Viktoria Kazakova):
GRADING
Groups AND individuals will be graded for this assignment. You will be awarded points based on your abilities to successfully fulfill your role in the group, and your abilities to work together as a group. You will also be awarded points for the presentation and your in-class work.

NOTES
Assessment Information for Assignment #2

1) You will be writing a summary of your experience with this project. *Please see the parameters for this on your original ‘Ancient Instruments’ worksheet as it indicates how many pages to write.

2) In addition to your short summary, here are some things to think about:

-What did this project teach you? This can refer to yourself, the labor of it, or what you learned about group work in general.

-How did you connect this project to class or to other ideas and materials learned in other classes at Merritt College?

-Are you pleased with the way your instrument looked and sounded? Elaborate.

-When was the last time you were able to create in a physical manner in the classroom setting?

-Were there any mishaps in your group that caused you to delay your project or leave it incomplete? Explain your concerns if any.

-Did all parties in your group remain in contact about your project, dates and times to meet, and how did you coordinate?

3) Please double-space, use an MLA heading (see Google or ask me), and a 12 point font and staple your paper.

4) State the role in your group (historian, foreman, bibliographer, coordinator).

*ATTN: Historians– you are NOT required to submit an assessment – it is optional as you are already submitting information about the historical aspect of the instrument.